



# 2010 Achievement Awards

Recognizing the Best in County Government Programs!

## **Nomination Packet**

RoCo PASS

Roanoke County Partners Advancing Senior Safety



**Roanoke County, Virginia**

**Roanoke County Fire & Rescue**

**5925 Cove Road**

**Roanoke, Virginia 24019**



# 2010 VACo Achievement Awards

Deadline: June 1, 2010

## Application Form

All applications must include the following information. Separate applications must be submitted for each eligible program.

Deadline: June 1, 2010

### Program Information

Locality Roanoke County

Program Title Roanoke County Partners Advancing Senior Safety

(RoCoPASS)

Program Category Criminal Justice & Public Safety

Population Category (4) 50,001 to 100,000

### Contact Information

Name Richard E. Burch, Jr.

Title Chief of Fire & Rescue

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### Signature of county administrator or chief administrative officer

Name Clay Goodman Dan O'Donnell

Title Assistant County Administrator

Signature\* \_\_\_\_\_

\*Entries without this signature will not be accepted.

## **2010 Virginia Association of Counties Achievement Awards**

### *Roanoke County Partners Advancing Senior Safety*

#### **(RoCo PASS)**

In 2008, Roanoke County suffered a devastating year as it mourned the loss of three citizens who perished in home fires. In each case, it was determined the fire had been burning for some time before being noticed, giving firefighters little to work with once they arrived. It was established that each of the fire deaths was that of a senior citizen, age 50 or older. But why were the seniors not able to escape? Was there a common thread among all of these seniors? Had something been missed along the way in the senior citizen fire prevention education? Brian Clingenpeel, the public education specialist for Roanoke County Fire & Rescue Department, was determined to answer all of these questions and swiftly before another fatality occurred.

Clingenpeel had recently attended National Fire Academy classes that assisted him with identifying where to target prevention efforts specific to Roanoke County's population and demographics. The county has a significant senior population with 15.8% of its citizens 65 or older, calculating higher than the Commonwealth of Virginia's average of 12.1%. Additionally, Clingenpeel had attended a *Remembering When* conference through an awarded scholarship/grant process. This training was helping to hone his fire prevention education skills, and he was ready to ramp up his efforts to reach out to our senior citizens. He met with and presented fire and life safety information to

seniors at churches, independent living and assisted living facilities. He thought he was reaching the county's most "at risk" seniors. However, he couldn't help but realize that all of the fire deaths in 2008 happened in single family homes. Were they people he had reached in churches and, if so, why had the deaths occurred?

Clingenpeel decided to delve further into his investigation of fire deaths in Roanoke County and looked back ten years. All of the county fire fatalities in the past decade were seniors and none of them fit into the categories that were being targeted – churches, independent living and assisted living facilities. They were seniors who kept to themselves, seniors who did not get out much and seniors who suffered from some sort of psychosocial factors including but not limited to alcoholism, paranoia, confusion and hoarding.

After completing his full examination of the 2008 fire fatalities, Clingenpeel realized he needed to get into "at-risk" senior homes and meet with them face-to-face to discuss fire prevention and safety. If he could build a relationship with the senior, he believed he could convince them to heed his warnings. He knew other localities had instituted massive door-to-door campaigns – installing smoke detectors, changing detector batteries and talking about fire safety. The county simply did not have the funds or staff resources to implement such a program.

Somehow, the most "at-risk" seniors needed to be identified so that Clingenpeel could center his efforts on them. Further analysis of the fire deaths returned findings that the county police department had visited each of the victim's homes in the months

leading up to the fires for a variety of reasons, including mental issues, excessive drinking and well-being checks. Clingenpeel felt he had found the missing link – the police department.

He developed a program called Fires & Fatalities and presented it to each of the three shifts of Roanoke County road officers, along with the specialized units consisting of resource and animal control officers. He addressed patterns and potential solutions, what to look for with seniors and when to notify him to make a visit. Several officers immediately provided him with the names of senior citizens they knew who could benefit from his visit, but Clingenpeel still needed an invitation into the home.

Clingenpeel then met with the county Social Services Department and provided the same Fires & Fatalities presentation to all shifts, as with the police department. Eventually, he partnered with an Adult Protective Service caseworker, Kathy Barnett, who routinely provided Clingenpeel with names of significantly at-risk senior clients who needed a fire safety assessment.

Clingenpeel and Barnett now make home visits together and discuss their areas of concern with the clients. Clingenpeel identifies if there are enough smoke detectors in the home and if they are located appropriately, and then tests the detectors to make sure they are working properly. If detectors are needed, he arranges to have them installed at no charge to the citizen. He completes a home inspection checklist and identifies with the senior citizen any dangers that may be present and how to remove or mitigate them. Any significant dangers identified are then recorded in the county's Computer Aided Dispatch

System alerting police officers, firefighters and paramedics who may be dispatched to the home. Clingenpeel and Barnett continue to follow up with these clients on a routine basis to make sure any concerns remain addressed.

Brian Clingenpeel has designated his group as the Roanoke County Partners Advancing Senior Safety (RoCo PASS).

The group is made up of the four departments within Roanoke County:

- Fire & Rescue
- Police
- Social Services
- Emergency Communications (9-1-1 dispatch center)



Each of the departments is grateful for Clingenpeel's help and values his work organizing this program and service. All agree this is a win-win situation for the citizens and departments involved.

Since the program's inception, 25 referrals have been made to Clingenpeel by either police officers or social service caseworkers. The referrals have included concerns regarding one or more of the following:

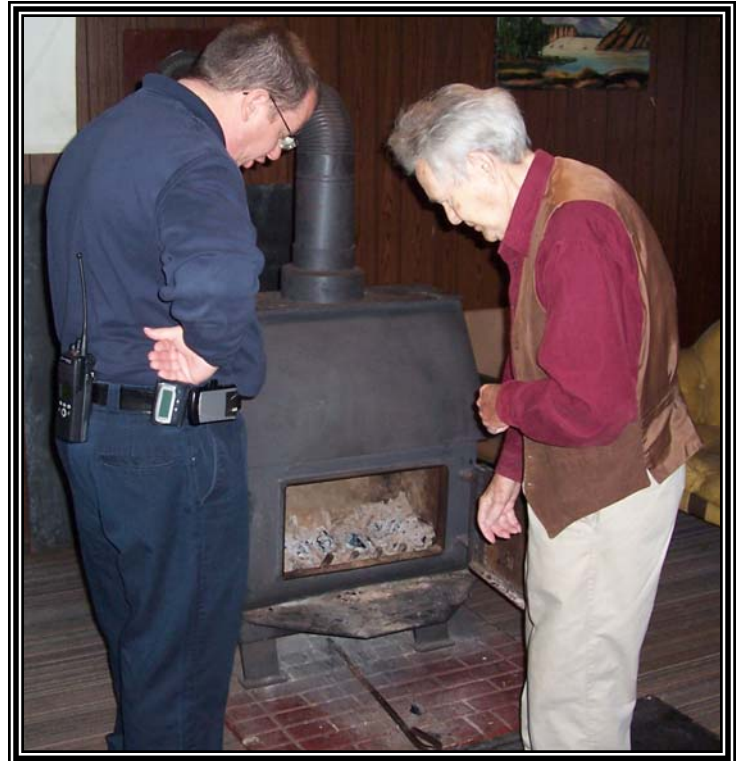
- hoarding
- alcoholism

- careless smoking
- impaired mobility
- legally blind senior using a wood stove

As with all fire prevention efforts, we will never know if we thwarted a fire fatality, but we do know we are making a difference in the lives of our “at-risk” seniors, whom we may have never known had Clingenpeel not developed this program. Some of the most at-risk seniors in Roanoke County are now more mindful of their behavior and safer because of it.

In 12 months, Clingenpeel changed the way four departments look at assessing seniors to include fire safety factors. He has literally taken an idea from concept to a successful program by building relationships with those on the front line from four departments within Roanoke County.

Two thousand and eight was a tragic year for Roanoke County because of the three fire fatalities, but 2009 and 2010 have been one of fire safety construction – constructing relationships with three other departments, constructing relationships with “at-risk” seniors and, thus far, constructing a fire fatality-free year. This program should be used as a model for other localities within the Commonwealth of Virginia as it combines resources to identify at-risk seniors and then educates them on how to prevent fires in their home.



**Top left:** Brian Clingenpeel, Roanoke County Fire & Rescue public education specialist, and Kathy Barnett, Social Services, visit with a client diagnosed with Muscular (Multiple?) Sclerosis to discuss how to prevent fires in her home and what to do in case a fire does occur.

**Above:** Clingenpeel has Mr. Sims, who is 91 years old and lives alone, explain how he uses his wood stove.

**Left:** Clingenpeel tests Mr. Sims's smoke detector to make sure it is working properly.



**Short Overview of**  
**Roanoke County Partners Advancing Senior Safety**

**RoCoPASS**

In 2008, Roanoke County suffered a devastating year as the department mourned the loss of three citizens who perished in home fires. In each case, it was determined the fire had been burning for some time before being noticed, giving firefighters little to work with once they arrived. It was established that each of the fire deaths was that of a senior citizen, age 50 or older.

In 2009, Roanoke County Fire & Rescue Department's Public Education Specialist Brian Clingenpeel methodically put together the Roanoke County Partners Advancing Senior Safety (RoCo PASS). The group, including the Police, Fire & Rescue, Social Services and Emergency Communications departments, works together to share information about at-risk seniors in the community. Members of RoCo PASS take a hands-on approach to working with seniors to educate them on a personal level about fire and life safety and then follow up to see how they are doing. The only cost to the program is the time spent discussing potentially "at risk" seniors among department representatives and the time it takes to meet with the senior. It is truly a win-win situation for all of the departments involved and especially for the senior citizen living in Roanoke County.

This program should be used as a model for other localities within the Commonwealth of Virginia as it combines resources to identify at-risk seniors and then educates them on how to prevent fires in their home at no real cost to the departments.